



THE GREAT ELECTRIC STREETCAR COMPANY AND OTHER STORIES

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As the current debate on the merits and future of mass transit in the United States grows in volume and intensity, it may be of some interest to look back on an age when mass transit was considered the only means for providing adequate mobility in a young and rapidly developing industrial nation. Ninety years ago, before the automobile and airplane, railroads, streetcars, inter-urban trams and steamboats were the foundation of the people transport system in and between cities. In those days no one doubted their value or place in American life and certainly no one doubted their future.

In the Tri-Cities urban mass transit began with the construction of a horsecar tramway between Moline and Rock Island in 1866. This was followed in Davenport in 1868 by the construction of the East Davenport section of the Third street horsecar system. The west section of that system, some four miles of track beginning at Perry Street and ending at the McManus property, was complete in late 1869. In Moline and Rock Island, eager entrepreneurs seized the opportunity to supply this new market for mobility and scenting sudden riches, stretched rails in helter-skelter fashion wherever franchises could be obtained. In 1872, the Davenport Brady Street system was built from the river to Central Park. The next year a line from downtown Davenport to Mt. Ida was completed.

The street railway boom was most evident in Davenport and Rock Island where investment capital and market demand exceeded Moline's. In 1886 the Northwest Davenport line up Marquette Street to the fairgrounds was completed and the Tri-Cities had the following street railway lines:

Davenport

Davenport Central Railway Co.

East and West Davenport Railway Co.

Bridge, Second Street, and Northwest Street Railway Company

Davenport Street Railway Company

Rock Island

Union Street Railway Company

Third Ave. Line Davenport City Railway Co.

Elm Street Line

Blackhawk Line

Milan Line

Moline

Moline and Rock Island Horse Railway Co.
Central Railway Company
Union Street Railway Company

Most of these lines were independently owned and each had one or more franchises from the city which allowed them to run track over specifically designated streets.

Every line had its own fares and there were no transfers between or among lines. Each time a passenger changed lines an additional fare was required. Patrons had to plan routes carefully to avoid unnecessary interline changes. Fares varied from 3 to 10 cents though some lines sold books of tickets at reduced rates, which were not transferable and had a time limitation on their use.

In October 1888 a milestone in the development of the local street railway companies occurred. Messrs. Allen and Swiney formed the Davenport Electric Street Railway Company to electrify the Brady Street line, establishing one of the first electric streetcar lines in the Central United States.

The rapid growth of urban transportation here had come to the notice of a group of Chicago investors and in 1889, after a series of complex negotiations, they bought out all but two of the horsecar street railway franchises in the three cities. One of these was the Central and Fairmont franchise in Moline controlled by W. L. Velie, L. S. McCabe and E. S. Guyer. The second was the Brady Street line controlled by Dr. Allen and Mr. Swiney.

The Chicago group was represented locally by one Mr. Holmes who proceeded to extend track at a rapid rate, much of it double tracked to prevent future competition from obtaining franchises and sharing choice routes or occupying the same streets with their tracks. By late 1889, the Chicago interests were in financial trouble as were Messrs. Allen and Swiney with their Brady Street Line. Ill advised expansion and cutthroat competition had pushed both companies to the wall.

Into this opportunity moved a second Chicago group headed by a man of formidable experience and immense confidence—Col. D.H. Lauderback. Originally from Davenport, Lauderback had made a career in buying, developing and selling public utility franchises including the Southeastern Bell Telephone Company franchise and a good part of what today is Consolidated Edison of Chicago. The Lauderback group bought the Holmes and the Allen and Swiney interests as well as franchises in Moline and Rock Island. The Tri-Cities finally had a unified street railway system. Only the Moline Central Line remained independent.

On January 1, 1891, the new company, incorporated as the Davenport and Rock Island Street Railway Company, took inventory and found it owned 135 cars (including several electric cars on the Brady Street Line), a power plant at

Second and Brady, and a spiderweb of track in three cities which was anything but a logical, well laid out public transportation system.

In late Spring of 1891, less than six months after the takeover, Lauderback made clear to the assembled Davenport City Council, what his company and its stockholders expected. Simply stated it was: six percent net return on the investment; repeal of special taxes for street paving and a cooperative attitude in granting modifications in franchises so the lines could be made more cost effective—"If the city will treat us in a friendly manner and aid us in our work of improvement here, we will do our part and more", he said. "If the council, on the other hand determines to handicap us and sit upon us as it has been doing, we shall protect our interests. I control this property and it will be handled as I say. I have the owners back of me and they will do what I recommend. We do not propose to pay a cent of tribute for the purpose of staying in a territory where we have to do business at a loss." He then outlined plans for changes in track system which the company would propose to the council. Since each change required a new ordinance or an amendment to an existing one, this was an essential step to securing authority for any change. This was the first of a long series of skirmishes between the streetcar company and various city officials. C. A. Ficke, then Mayor of Davenport, probably owed his conversion to belief in municipal ownership of public utilities (with which he later harassed the company) in large part to Col. Lauderback. At the beginning, however, city councils remained mesmerized with the belief that streetcars meant progress and were inclined to follow Lauderback's rather than Ficke's concept of what was good for the community.

It was clear to the new owners the system had great potential but three things were needed. The first was to make travel by street railway more attractive by reducing travel time and increasing passenger comfort; second was to restructure the system so that the cost per passenger mile could be reduced and streetcar travel made more competitive; third was to generate new reasons to ride streetcars and increase traffic volume.

Since there was an absolute practical limit to the speed and comfort possible with horsecars, the company embarked on a program of electrifying all lines as rapidly as possible in order of descending profitability. A power plant in Rock Island was built and the work of putting up poles and stringing wire began. The city councils of the three towns were approached to allow track to be taken up, rerouted and extended. Old systems were integrated, lines connected and roadbeds improved.

As a part of the program to electrify and upgrade the street railway system, the new owners sought a dramatic (and profitable) way to capture public attention and increase passenger traffic. They thought they had found it in the electrification of the horsecar line over the Government Bridge. It was one of the most heavily traveled lines and had the advantage of connecting the cities

on both sides of the river. In February 1892, the company requested permission from the Secretary of War to electrify the bridge line. The request provoked a storm of protest from people who believed the electric cars would so frighten horses that the lives of drivers and passengers of horsedrawn conveyances would be in danger. Even suggestions that each electric car be preceded by a horse to reassure all oncoming horses was shouted down and the project was postponed. The company tried again in September of 1893 and once again was turned down when the Businessmen's Association, spurred on by rhetoric such as "Shall we, that the streetcar company may avoid a little expense, place the lives of our families in daily jeopardy?" passed a unanimous resolution against the proposal and once again permission from the War Department was denied.

In fact, it was not until May of 1894 that electrification of the bridge line was approved and horsecars between Davenport and Rock Island passed into history. Contrary to predictions, horses and teams encountering the new electric cars did not bolt or leap into the river and the Bridge Line became the financial foundation of the company.

The most visible and probably most popular of the strategies of the company was the development of various parks and recreation areas to promote use of streetcars for excursions, family outings and holiday celebrations. With the purchase of the Rock Island street railway franchises the Davenport and Rock Island Street Railway had also acquired a tract of land on the Rock River bluff which today is Blackhawk State Historic Site, formerly a State Park.

Chief Blackhawk's Watchtower, rising above the site of the largest of the Sac and Fox villages, was already a well known recreation area and the company set about developing it further. In July of 1892 the first Blackhawk Inn was opened. The line to the Watchtower had been electrified previously and special trains of motors and trailers were run from Moline and Davenport for the grand opening. Motormen and conductors wore buttonhole bouquets, white ties and white gloves while the leading citizens of the three cities, seated in careful arrangement in three brilliantly lighted trains, were conducted in style to the great event. This set the tone for the rest of the social world of the three cities. Blackhawk's Watchtower was the place to go-and the company was ready to receive the throngs. Modestly at first, but with an increasingly lavish budget, they booked summer entertainment at the Watchtower. More attractions were added. A shooting gallery, a toboggan slide into Rock River and an outdoor theater. To attract people to the park, entertainment was free with two performances per day—one at 4 p.m. and one at 8 p.m. Fares to Blackhawk's Watchtower were ten cents one way with special excursion fares for round trips. The fares and the profit from concessions paid for the show.

Though Schuetzen Park in Davenport was not a company property, attractions there were promoted and special cars run to that location on Sundays and holidays. Later Prospect Park and Fejervary Park became locations to which

the street railway company was delighted to run their tracks.

By the Summer of 1895 the playbill at the Watchtower included the following attractions:

- Hungarian band in native costumes.
- Severus Schaeffer jugglers.
- Bark Beu Achmet troop of Arabs from Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.
- Annabelle - serpentine dancer from Trocadero, Chicago.
- Lenton Brothers.
- Chinese acrobats.
- Harding and Ah Sid, the Englishman and Chinaman - equilibrists and head balancers.
- Mlle. Olive - juggler.
- Princess Dolzornky - violinist with a troop of Russian musicians.
- Takazawas - Japanese - general acrobatic and balancing work.
- Romolo Bros. - acrobatic pantomime.
- Marionettes - eight in number - comic pantomime.
- Three Mawelles - grotesques ala Hanlon.
- Mazey and Abacco - flying trapeze and triple bars.
- Mlle. Alberti - female wire performer.
- Carlini's trained monkeys and dogs.
- Muhlemann trio - Swiss warblers.
- Innes famous band in its war piece.

Later that same summer, "As You Like It" was presented in the open air theater by a Shakespeare Company from Chicago. Admission was by subscription only and attendance at the performance was 400 of the "wealthy and cultured of the three prosperous cities" according to the local press. The syndicate was off to a good start.

Fame spread quickly and people from other communities began to plan outings to Blackhawk's Watchtower. On June 26, 1895, the steamer W.J. Young brought 500 people from Muscatine to see the attractions and spend the day.

In spite of all that Lauderback could do, and in spite of repeated warnings from the company, the Populist philosophy (our immigrant heritage) prevailed in the city councils. As the cities expanded and demand for better streets became an issue, councils forced the company to pave the streets on which they ran their tracks to avoid angering voters by imposing assessments on adjacent property. Things came to a head in July of 1895. The company, faced with over \$250,000 of assessments accumulated in 3 short years, ran out of cash and called the bluff of the town fathers. Company officers announced the company was insolvent and unable to pay its debts. They offered reorganization as an alternative to receivership and told the world there were no choices except to

support the reorganization or take a chance in the bankruptcy courts.

Though there are no available records of what really took place, a remarkable lack of concern was evidenced in the interviews granted to the press by local management regarding the crisis. The secretary of the company and local manager, when questioned about the affect of the financial crisis on the company, said of the Moline operations, "I do not think the insolvency of the company will affect the local lines". —An interesting observation from an individual who was manager of the local operation, an officer of the company and a stockholder whose financial interests would be affected by any reorganization.

The triumphant result of this gambit was the recapitalization of the company with an infusion of \$600,000 in new capital, a 2-year moratorium on all paving assessments by all cities involved and a new appreciation by the cities of their dependence on the company for development of their industries and outlying areas. They had suddenly been faced with the possibility of no public transportation. The threat had been veiled, the voice had been soft and gentle but it was clear—"Don't kill the goose that lays the golden eggs."

There is some evidence that the crisis was not quite as serious as publicly advertised except for the burden of the paving assessments. The Chicago Chronicle, on October 23, 1895, reported that the soon-to-be reorganized company had reported September operating expenses were 60% of gross receipts and that earnings would permit the \$630,000 of bonds to be serviced and still pay a 10% dividend on \$600,000 of outstanding common stock once the floating indebtedness (short-term debt) was reduced.

The development of the Electric Street Railways was not without its environmental problems. Shortly after the electrification of the streetcar lines and the installation of electric street lights in larger towns and cities, complaints from the Gas and Water companies began. Underground pipelines were being eaten away by electrolysis, and the leakage of electricity from the power systems was blamed for the apparent sudden and serious deterioration of water and gas mains. The streetcar company hastened to assure the public that "they had carefully tested the outflow of current from their dynamos and that which was returned, and found the loss hardly appreciable."

This problem, however, was to be heard from, off and on, for a number of years. In some cities such as Omaha, the courts were asked to enjoin the street railway company from using electric motive power- and the water company sued the street railway company for \$25,000.

At the end of 1895, the reorganized company appeared to have overcome its difficulties and was looking forward to easier times when the first of two events occurred that caused a severe blow to earnings and taxed both management ability and financial resources of the company over the next two years.

In January 1896, the Government Bridge was closed for major repairs to the

drawspan and it was expected that traffic would be resumed by the opening of the navigation season in April. In February, however, an unfortunate thaw sent ice piling against the temporary wooden supports upon which the drawspan rested, carried them away and the entire drawspan crashed into the river. Except for railroad traffic, which was restored quickly, the bridge remained closed to all vehicles until the middle of December and almost a year's revenue of the Bridge Line was lost. To compound the company's problems, on July 3, 1896, the Watchtower Inn burned to the ground. The streetcar firm was now without the centerpiece of its major attraction and without continuous car service between Illinois and Iowa.

At first the news was hopeful. The Inn would be rebuilt immediately and perhaps a part of the summer season could be salvaged. In any case, all attractions would be presented as scheduled and the only amenities not available would be those which had involved the Inn itself. Optimism was dashed, however, when the town of Sears, which had annexed the Watchtower property some years earlier to benefit from the real estate taxes paid on the park, passed an ordinance requiring the licensing of all shows and concessions. Though the proposed licensee fees were said to be negotiable, the very existence of the ordinance was unacceptable to the management of the streetcar company and the struggle was on. There would be no new Inn until the ordinance was repealed and a ten year moratorium on such nonsense declared. The Sears city fathers, confidant the company was bluffing, refused to negotiate and hinted at further demands. By late July the city elders began to fear that the threat was real and a compromise was offered. A five cent fare to Sears (it was then ten cents) and the town would rescind all license fees for 10 years. The answer was a polite but firm "no deal". As summer ended, newspapers in the larger cities began a drumfire criticism of the little town. With ridicule and threat they let it be known that Sears was a dog -in-the manger and was selfishly denying worthy citizens of larger better towns the blessings the streetcar company was disposed to bestow.

Pressure increased but before negotiations could be resumed, a rider attached to a Federal appropriations bill for the War Department caught the attention of the press and the populace. Sponsored by an obscure Texas congressman, it required a toll be paid by the streetcar company for using the Government Bridge. The tax was to be \$200 per month and was not to be levied on any other user except the street railway company. There was speculation that certain local "enemies" of the company had been behind the tax, though they were never publicly identified. Once again, scarcely a month after the bridge between Rock Island and Davenport had been reopened, streetcar service between the cities was threatened.

The community was galvanized into action. Petitions containing over 5,000 names were sent to Washington within days. Letters to congressmen, senators,

state legislators, governors, and the Secretary of War were dispatched and a mighty lobbying effort for repeal begun. This effort, led by Congressman George M. Curtis and orchestrated by E. E. Cook and J. F. Lardner of the Tri-City Railway Company was an astonishing success.

Beginning January 23, intense lobbying in Congress on behalf of repeal began and by February 4 the repeal bill had passed both houses with little opposition. On February 16, it was signed into law and the crisis was over.

On March 1, the Sears town board followed the example of Congress and repealed the licensing ordinance, guaranteeing a 5-year moratorium on all licenses of any kind whatsoever. Two days later the company announced the Inn would be rebuilt and that summer, on June 25, a grand opening was held to which over 5,000 people attended. The Sears town board retired to nurse its grievances against the company and plot more mischief for the future.

The Summer and Fall of 1897 went well for the Street Railway Company. In addition to the normal entertainment such as jugglers, trained dog acts, trapeze artists and singing groups, a short session of comic opera and a circus were booked at the Watchtower. Among the operas presented were "The Chimes of Normandy", "The Mascot", "Olivette" and "Fra Diavolot." Independence Day brought a crowd of 10,000-15,000 visitors to the Watchtower, setting an all-time record. People from towns as far away as Cedar Rapids arranged excursions with as many as 1,500 coming on a single day and the streetcar company was delighted to take them to Blackhawk's Tower. The original company policy of free entertainment was modified and special attractions now required an admission fee of as much as 25¢, but still they came. The triumph of the Summer Season of 1897 was an appearance by the Cherry Sisters. Local papers reported that relatively few vegetables were thrown by the audience but that the lack of cabbages and onions was made up yelling - "and in this the crowd was at least as musical as the performers."

The rapid spread of electric cars brought with it a range of new problems. Because of the higher speeds involved (up to 10 MPH) there were more accidents, some fatal. A growing concern for the animals pastured along the tracks in the less settled parts of the cities became apparent in press stories. The line to Sears and the Watchtower was particularly vulnerable as a report from the Davenport Democrat will attest:

"The object (of the fence) is not to prevent the cars from straying off the right of-way and getting lost in the woods, but to keep the cattle of farmers along the line from straying onto it and getting killed. The company paid for three cows there last summer. This money brought it no returns. It was practically a dead investment. By a singular fatality the cars last summer selected only those cows that had long and highly venerated pedigrees or that had been given to their owners by 'dear friends' for whose sake they were dearly cherished or had been for

years in the family till the children were so attached to them they seemed almost like members of the home circle --. If it had not been for the generosity of the owners in dealing with the company, the entire season's earnings would have stood in danger of being absorbed."

There were also problems with bicycle riders, who in spite of the hazards involved, insisted on riding on the paved section between double sets of tracks hoping they would not be unfortunate enough to be caught between a streetcar on one side and an extra wide wagon or a nervous team on the other. These "scorchers" caused motormen no end of headaches and many were injured. There were also problems of downed wires, short circuits, unexpected grounds and runaway cars when brakes failed on Tri-City hills. The newspapers were generally sympathetic however in contrast to the present day. One report related the unfortunate incident in which a passenger, alighting from an electric streetcar at Fourth and Brown Streets "received an accidental shock of electricity which, owing to her nervous temperament, badly scared her. The conductor was obliged to pull the lady away from the car, she being unable to let go of the handrail, "(presumably owing also to her nervous temperament!)

This was a time for other developments in the Tri-Cities. On July 26, some 200 Tri-City people gathered at Rock Island Arsenal to celebrate the opening of the golfing season by the lately organized Rock Island Arsenal Golf Club. "After the conventional formalities and upon the arrival of the gentlemen, the guests adjourned to the link in front of the officer's quarters. All of the gentlemen were dressed in outing or golfing costumes, Capt. Blunt, however, being the only one wearing the regulation scarlet coat. Two games were played by Mr. James F. Lardner and Mr. John Van Patten of Davenport and Mr. and Mrs. Butterworth of this city." — the Moline Dispatch reported.

With the closing of 1897, plans were announced for major improvements to the company powerhouse in Rock Island, and the first evidence of Tri-City money displacing Chicago investors appeared with the election of Fred Denkman of Rock Island as Vice President and as a director of the company.

Though 1898 brought the sinking of the U.S. Battleship, Maine, and the outbreak of the Spanish-American War, life in the Tri-Cities went on much as usual. Another light opera season began at Blackhawk's Tower and the Saengerfest held in Davenport attracted 20,000 people to the final afternoon and evening picnic. All of this, plus a rush of war orders for the Rock Island Arsenal, kept streetcar business growing.

It was October of 1898 that the takeover of the Tri-City Streetcar system by local interests was announced. Chicago directors were replaced and a board representing investors in all three cities was appointed. For the first time in ten years, urban transportation was again under local control.

The change was followed by an immediate flurry of announcements of improvements in service and schedules. Working hours for company employ-

ees were reduced 1 to 1 1/2 hours per day with no reduction in pay. The press and public responded favorably to a company generous enough to allow their employees to work only 11 to 11-1/2 hours per day with no penalty.

It was not long before the new owners made a major move to complete the consolidation of the Tri-City Street Railway companies. It became obvious that negotiations had been underway for some time for the purchase of the Moline Central Line. With that agreement in his pocket, General Manager Lardner approached the Moline City Council with a request for an extension of the Moline franchises, including the Central line, for twenty-five years. In return for this he offered to rebuild and re-equip the Central line to develop Prospect Park, which had languished under the Moline ownership, into a rival to Blackhawk's Watchtower and to offer transfers on all lines to eliminate double fares.

At first the proposal was treated with cautious enthusiasm but the opposition organized rapidly. The Tri-City Labor Congress, after much debate, produced a list of concessions to be demanded from the company that were pure distilled Populism. Unionization of company employees and reduced working hours, all profits over a modest amount to be turned over for the public good, reduced fares for the working classes and no passes to city officials. The Moline Businessmen' Association was against it because it would make it possible to shop in other cities for a single fare (5¢). In spite of the opposition, there was never any question of the outcome. Amid accusations from the Labor Congress of payoffs, the franchise passed the council on Feb. 6, 1899. Purchase of the Moline Central Line was completed with payment of \$64,000 in cash and there was, for the first time, a single unified urban transportation system in the three cities.

The company quickly turned its attention to Rock Island with a similar request for franchise extensions. Again, concessions were demanded of the company, principally a 5¢ fare to Blackhawk's Watchtower and a promise to keep the powerhouse and car house in Rock Island during the life of the franchise. Again, the Tri-City Labor Congress opposed the extension for the same reasons as in the case of the Moline franchise. And again the council approved the franchise after being assured that transfers would be issued on all lines except to Blackhawk Watchtower, where fares remained at 10¢ with no transfers.

The last of the cities, Davenport, was the most difficult of all. Led by C.A. Ficke, a faction of Davenport politicians was determined to out-negotiate the other cities. The battle was fought in the newspapers and in the chambers of the various civic organizations. The Tri-City Labor Congress, aware this was the last of the extensions to complete the whole, lobbied harder than ever. Councilmen vied to see who could think of the concession with the greatest popular appeal. The battle raged from March 2 until May 10 when the company, tired

of the delay, issued an ultimatum. They offered a 5¢ fare to all parts of the system (except Blackhawk's Watchtower), an option for the City of Davenport to buy the Davenport Lines at the end of the franchise period and certain improvements in service, most of which would have been carried out without the extension. The council accepted and granted the 25-year franchise.

The company was now in a position to consolidate existing debt and refinance on more favorable terms. This was done and new capital made available for further extensions and improvements of the system. Lines were run to the Rock Island Arsenal shops for the first time and workmen from all three cities could ride to their jobs by streetcar.

The year 1902 was an eventful one. The success of the Tri-City Railway Co. had encouraged other investors who saw electric cars as the solution to rapid, low cost transportation between Davenport, Moline and Rock Island and nearby cities and towns. Franchises which city councils had power to grant had turned out to be pure gold and inter-city franchises became a "concept" which could be sold to eager investors. Two companies were formed: The Davenport Suburban Railway Company and the Davenport and Western Electric Railway Company. The Davenport and Suburban proposed a line to Muscatine via Buffalo, connecting with a new loop to be constructed in Davenport which would parallel the lines of the Tri-City road in the central portion of the city. The second company, the Davenport and Western, intended to run lines to Blue Grass, Iowa City and perhaps Cedar Rapids.

Not the least fazed by these announcements, the Tri-City Railway Company disclosed plans to begin constructing its own cars in expanded Davenport shop facilities. It also watched with interest while the Davenport Council passed a motion denying the use of certain key streets to "any railway company." The fact that a number of these streets were basic to the plans of the Davenport and Western and the Davenport and Suburban came as no surprise.

In the ensuing struggle, the Davenport and Suburban, through careful compromise was finally granted a franchise. The Davenport and Western, promoted by outsiders who were less skillful in manipulating local politicians, failed. As the franchise battles raged, business had to go on and the Tri-City Railway Company presented its proposal for the enlargement of the Davenport shops to the Council. That body, convinced of their ability to secure a reduced fare as the price of granting the request, again issued an ultimatum to the company. The company refused any change of fares and the ordinance was vetoed by Mayor Becker. The response was immediate. It was announced the shops would be moved to Rock Island-and Davenport had lost another industry and the jobs it represented.

This caused some considerable consternation among the local businessmen and the Davenport Businessmen's Association called a mass meeting to discuss the problem. Alderman J. A. Hanley, an administration stalwart, vigorously

defended the action of the Council and the Mayor with a blistering attack on the company and its General Manager, "Slippery Jim Lardner." At the end of his tirade, he asked if Lardner or one of his representatives were present. He was informed they hadn't come because they were too busy moving the factory to Rock Island.

The village of Sears, which had not been heard from since the licensing crisis, now made headlines when it asked for an injunction against the Tri-City Lines to stop traffic through Sears to the Watchtower. Village authorities announced they intended to have the franchise declared illegal until they were granted a 5¢ fare. Rather than wait for a resolution of the case by the courts, the good citizens of Sears, under the direction of the President of the Village Board, tore up 50 feet of track and leveled the roadbed. The village fathers were promptly arrested by the County Sheriff, enjoined by the courts from further interference with company property and sued for \$10, 000 damages.

Sears, however, persisted in its suit to have the franchise invalidated. In spite of a lower court finding against Sears, the Illinois Supreme Court held that the franchise not only was not valid but that the Tri-City Railway Company could not accept a franchise in Illinois because it was a foreign company. This changed the game, and the company, reversing its long established position, offered Sears the same 5¢ fare as all other towns had enjoyed for years. Once again company lobbyists went into action and in three months a bill was passed by the Illinois Senate and House and signed by Governor Yates legalizing all Illinois franchises granted to the Tri-City Lines. The 5¢ fare had been established, however, and Sears at last had what it had so long demanded — parity with the other cities; Sears' citizens were no longer second class.

In December 1902, Company employees were organized for the first time and in May of 1903, the company recognized their union. A contract was signed granting a 10-hour day. Pay was increased 18¢ per hour over the base wage for first-year employees, 20¢ per hour over the base wage for second-year employees and 25¢ additional per hour was to be paid for all overtime. This was a substantial increase from old scale and was greeted with enthusiasm by employees. In addition, the company agreed it would not discriminate against union members and would not "deter members of the union from trying, by means of reasonable argument, to persuade any trainman to affiliate himself with the union." Arbitration of company-union differences was agreed to and appeal from arbitrary discharge was provided. All in all, a reasonably enlightened agreement long before the Wagner Act was passed.

The inter-urban franchise business had, by this time, become a battleground of promoters. Ranking just behind the Dutch tulip bulb speculation, it drew to the Tri-Cities a kind of promoter that entertained, awed and excited the avarice of the local power structure. In 1901 there were, as there are today, various power centers in the community. Some of these were based on a common

ethnic heritage or an alliance of ethnic groups. One such was the improbable grouping of Davenport Catholic Irish and Davenport German Protestants. There was another power center which could loosely be classified as the Old Settlers Society—the “bluebloods” of the community. These were the industrialists who had in common only their devotion to laissez-faire capitalism. There were also the ever-present populists—those ubiquitous “common men” who have managed through the ages to be against progress, people who have more, privilege, change, business, people who can read, organized civic endeavor (except lynch mobs), and anything upon which they vent their envy of people more successful than they.

In June 1901, the first of the inter-urban railway lines was organized. Incorporated by C.H. Deere, Lyle Taylor and F.Y. Keator, they requested and received a franchise to run a line from Moline through East Moline to Watertown. They promised a park for recreation equal to Blackhawk’s Watchtower and hinted at an eventual extension of the line to Port Byron. On September 4, 1901, the franchise was granted and the Tri-Cities first inter-urban line was in being.

The success of this effort produced one of the most unusual periods in the history of public transportation in the Tri-Cities. Nearly everyone had a wonderful scheme for an inter-urban line to one or more nearby cities. The conditions that created this peculiar situation were a temporary but significant advantage in cost per passenger mile which single electric trolley cars had over short-haul railroads. In this age, before the automobile, an inter-urban trolley which averaged 28 miles per hour had far greater appeal than a horse and buggy which averaged six or seven miles per hour, particularly if the trip was between say Clinton and Davenport or Davenport and Muscatine.

It was into a ready-made market the promoters came, not to bring transportation to the masses, but to secure the franchises, which could be sold to the capitalists who would actually build the lines and enjoy the long-term benefits.

The first of the promoters were from Clinton. Rumored to be representing “Eastern Money”, Messrs. Ham and Handy promised to construct a line from Davenport to Clinton. They incorporated the Iowa and Illinois Railway Company and began a campaign to obtain franchises from Davenport, Clinton, Scott and Clinton Counties and all the cities between Clinton and Davenport.

In short order the Davenport and Suburban Railway Company was formed for the purpose of building a line to Muscatine. The promoters of this line spoke grandly of eventual extensions to Cedar Rapids.

At this moment in history, Colonel U.P. Hoard, John U. May and Mrs. Alice M. Butler descended on the city fathers of Moline, Rock Island and Davenport. Hoard, who had been one of the promoters of the Moline, East Moline and Watertown Railway Co. now offered to build inter-urban lines to almost anywhere the popular fancy demanded. He proposed a line from Muscatine to

Davenport, which he said would benefit users more than the niggardly proposal of the Davenport and Suburban. He also offered to connect the Moline, East Moline and Watertown to this new line so a rider could go from Watertown to Muscatine without changing cars. He promised future lines to Iowa City and to Cedar Rapids. Hoard's company, the Davenport and Western Railway Company, was organized to demonstrate to the community the sincerity of his intentions. John U. May and Mrs. Alice Butler arrived on different days and with different proposals for the town fathers. Mrs. Butler, claiming to be from Cleveland and to represent Mark Hanna and the Hanna Mining interests, organized and promoted the Davenport and Clinton Line. John U. May promoted his own.

After many promises and intensive lobbying, all three companies were granted tentative franchises to enter and to operate in the city of Davenport. These franchises were only one step in the establishment of an inter-urban line but they were also a salable property for promoters and speculators.

Hoard now turned his attention to Rock Island where he requested a franchise to connect the Moline, East Moline and Watertown to a bridge line and thence to Davenport and his future Davenport-Muscatine line.

At this juncture, the plot thickened somewhat. John U. May, Davenport alderman A.J. Hanley and Mrs. Alice Butler turned up in the same game. With former Davenport Mayor Henry Vollmer as their attorney, they mounted a concerted effort to discredit the rival Iowa and Illinois Railway Co. It was a valiant effort, but their opponents were the Walsh Brothers of Clinton who had demonstrated the cunning of the Borgias and the ruthlessness of Genghis Kahn in obtaining the Davenport street lighting contract. After a long and bitter battle with the May interests defeated in vote after vote, the May interests sold out to the Walshes and construction of the Davenport-Clinton inter-urban began in earnest.

In the meantime the Tri-City Railway Company was not idle nor was it disinterested. From the beginning, it was apparent that the Davenport and Suburban Railway Co. was not nearly as interested in constructing an inter-urban line to Muscatine as it was in obtaining a franchise to compete with the Tri-City Lines in rapidly growing areas of Davenport to which the Street Railway Company had not yet extended service. Without fanfare but displaying the power and influence it commanded after ten years, the company watched benignly as the Davenport City Council passed an ordinance reserving certain streets for fire companies and private horse drawn conveyances. Curiously, many of these streets were those sought by the Davenport and Suburban in its franchise application. The Iowa and Illinois Railway Company made no attempt to confront the Tri-City Lines but negotiated an agreement to use Tri-City track to enter the city from the east. They elected wisely to use the existing company to deliver passengers for the trip to Clinton. The Davenport and

Suburban meanwhile was encountering difficulties in raising capital. Twice they were forced to ask the city council for an extension of the performance deadline. One year after the promised date, with help from the Tri-City Lines, they reached the city limits; a year later on Labor Day they reached Grand Isle (today Credit Island).

John U. May, after a falling out with his associates, finally sold all of his rights and interests in the Clinton-Davenport line to the Iowa and Illinois Railway Company. Except for a later, unsuccessful court suit against the owners of the Moline, East Moline and Watertown Railway Co., May occupied his attention with promoting the development of a large tract of east Davenport land known as Camp McClelland together with one Charles E. Reed.

By 1904 the early inter-urban wars were settled or nearly settled. The Davenport and Suburban, having built as far as Grand Isle, lost enthusiasm for continuing to Muscatine and turned attention to obtaining authority to cross the Government Bridge to connect with the Moline, East Moline, and Watertown.

Intense lobbying began, locally and in Washington D. C. The Tri-City Railway Company saw this move as a serious threat and pulled out all stops. From February until May of 1908 the battle raged. In May, reversing an earlier decision, Secretary of War Taft decided that permission to cross the bridge would not be granted to the Davenport and Suburban and the Walsh threat to the Tri City Railway Company was over.

By this time, inter-urban fever was at a peak. Companies were being formed weekly, promising to run lines to Aledo, Monmouth, Galesburg, Geneseo, Rock Falls, in fact to almost any location that had more than 1,000 souls. Most of these schemes were dreams of promoters such as Hoard and May and were never realized, or if built, were constructed on a much more modest scale than advertised.

The great age of urban mass transit was now entering a period of consolidation and gradual expansion. The first heady rush to a new system of transportation in and between cities was over. The automobile, which would eventually cause the demise of the street railways and inter-urbans, had been invented and Henry Ford was gaining the experience and building the skills that produced the Model T.

Perhaps sensing this, almost on signal, the various groups of warring entrepreneurs, owners of nearly all of the public utility and transportation systems" decided to sell out. Companies involved were the Tri-City Railway, Davenport and Suburban, People's Power Company, Davenport Gas & Electric, People's Light Company, and Moline - East Moline and Watertown Railway.

Men who for over 10 years had been allies, adversaries, managers, owners, promoters, lobbyists, schemers and visionaries, suddenly found themselves out of the fray. VanderVeer, Davis, Walsh, Cook, Deere, Dougherty, Lardner,

Denkman, the organizers and movers and their colorful lawyers, Lane, Scott, Vollmer, Hanley, Sharon et. al., moved on to other things. The day of the Great Electric Street Car Company had passed.

Epilog -

By 1905, the Tri-City Lines had become a profitable, well-run organization. J. F. Lardner was appointed general manager of the Tri-City Railway, Peoples Power, and Mississippi Valley Traction Company. He resigned in 1912 to become plant manager of the Rock Island Plow Company.

Despite occasional ice storm damage and the burning of the car barn in 1913, the line continued to expand and upgrade. In 1917-18 the World War I increased ridership, but took its toll on equipment wear and increased costs of maintenance.

Buses were first introduced in 1924. Because of the lack of need for track and cable maintenance, along with the ability to adapt to rapidly changing needs and routes, they had totally replaced the streetcar by 1940. The last run of a Tri-City Line streetcar was across Arsenal Island on the sixteenth of April 1940. The cars were sold off to become small cottages, diners, chicken coops and the like. The Iowa-Illinois Gas and Electric Company, which had acquired control of the lines, continued to run them until 1950. As it no longer provided the power for the vehicles, its interest in the streetcar company had waned. Iowa-Illinois Gas and Electric sold the Tri-City Line to National City Lines.

About the author-

J. F. Lardner III has written about his grandfather, James F. Lardner, who was a Chicago-born son of Irish immigrants. His grandfather obtained his engineering degree at Loyola University in Chicago and came to the area as the secretary of Col. D. H. Lauderback. When the Colonel returned to Chicago, he assumed the management of the company.

All of James F. Lardner's papers and materials upon which this history is based are deposited in the archives of the Putnam Museum in Davenport, Iowa.

J. F. Lardner III was born in Moline in 1924. He attended Moline grade schools and St. Ambrose Academy.

During World War II he was in the Navy V-12 Program. Following discharge and graduation from Cornell University with an engineering degree, he began work at the foundry of the John Deere Plows Works. This was interrupted by a recall to active duty during the Korean conflict after which he returned to a position in the general engineering department of Deere & Co. After positions managing plants in Mexico, Brazil, Spain and Des Moines, his final position at Deere was as Vice President of North America Tractor Operation, with responsibility for design of all Deere agricultural tractors.

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